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NEWS HEADLINES

US Ambassador meets MILF chair

(Source: MindaNews Online – 2/19/08)

DAVAO CITY (MindaNews/19 Feb) – The United States' representative to the Philippines, Ambassador Kristie Kenney, visited this morning the camp of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and met behind closed doors with the MILF chair, the first US ambassador to do so.

MILF chair Al Haj Murad Ebrahim told reporters after his meeting with Kenney that the American ambassador told him the US government is for the completion of the peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) as it would benefit not only the Moro people, but the international community as well.

Kenney met with Murad at the MILF peace panel's office in Camp Darapanan, Sultan Kudarat town in Shariff Kabunsuan.

Kenney declined to answer queries from reporters, saying only that "it was a private meeting."

"We are very glad she came over, we appreciate her government's efforts to help attain genuine peace in Mindanao," Murad said.

MILF peace panel chair Mohagher Iqbal told MindaNews that Kenney was accompanied by Deputy Chief of Mission Paul Jones; USAID mission director Jon Lindborg; Col. William Coultrup, chief of the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, and Dave Maxwell, former chief of the JSOTF-Philippines. Iqbal identified Coultrup as "head of the US forces in Mindanao" and Maxwell as "politico-military officer of the US Embassy in Manila."

Kenney and company arrived at 10 a.m. at the MILF peace panel office in Camp Darapanan and left a little past 11 a.m. after a brief talk with other MILF officials and after a 20-minute cultural presentation at the multipurpose gym.

Iqbal told MindaNews Kenney "expressed support to the peace process and for capability-building trainings."

He said Kenney and Jones talked with Murad behind closed doors for about 30 minutes while he and MILF vice chair for political affairs Ghazaali Jaafar and other officials spoke with the three other US officials.

Iqbal said Lindborg explained to Jaafar that the US troops in Mindanao are not conducting military exercises in Mindanao for Balikatan 2008 scheduled February 18 to March 3, but "humanitarian missions."
(MindaNews)